



MESA MIDDLE SCHOOL

2025-26 Instrumental Music Handbook

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Parents: This is long, but PLEASE read! It will hopefully save time and emails. With there being large classes this year, it is of the utmost importance that parents and students alike understand the information contained in this handbook.

Welcome to the 2025-26 edition of the Mesa Middle School Instrumental Music Program Handbook. This handbook is designed as a guide to inform you of the rules, regulations, standards of conduct and etiquette, and policies of the band and orchestra. It is my philosophy that *anyone* can succeed in instrumental music. Besides increased musicianship and performance skills, band and orchestra also builds: character, discipline, ability to work in a group, individual leadership skills, group leadership skills, improved time management skills, listening skills, a desire to serve others, equipment management skills, facility management skills, hands-on learning, improved hand-eye coordination and other important motor skills, a desire to serve yourself, enjoyment and personal satisfaction from the results of hard work, and a genuine concern for the well-being of others. As a teacher, I strive for excellence in every area of the overall program, and am also concerned for your well-being as a human being, a good citizen and contributing student of Mesa Middle School. Please understand that the material presented here is given very specifically and clearly and is written for the organization's benefit, as well as your own.

REHEARSALS

When coming to any rehearsal, it is expected that you are *on time*. Being on time means being in your chair, having your instrument assembled, with *pencil* and music out and ready. We will make numerous pencil checks that will weigh into your work habits grade. These may be announced or unannounced. It is necessary for each student to have his/her instrument and music/pencil at every rehearsal. The student's work habits grade will be affected for coming to class without all equipment. The only exception would be if the instrument is being repaired or if there is an extenuating circumstance (to be dealt with on a case by case basis). ***Gum and/or***

food is not allowed in the Band/Orchestra room. However, water is always acceptable! Students will also be expected to participate in the rehearsal and stay in your assigned seat or area, and pay attention throughout class.

What a good rehearsal looks like:

Pre-assumption: Rehearsal time is sacred; This is a place for great music-making. *Rehearsal isn't for learning your part, it is for learning everyone else's.*

- come in, get out instrument and music in a timely fashion, sit in your assigned seat
- get *music and pencil* in order and watch for director's cues to begin
- when the director is on the podium or in the front of class, **no talking please**
- no discussions about anything during rehearsal, raise hand for permission to speak
- do your best to play your part
- goals for your home practicing based on what happens in rehearsal
- practice at home, rehearse in class
- when director is off the podium, visiting, talking, and practicing is allowed
- students should take no more than 5 seconds to notice when director is on the podium
- classroom atmosphere depends on your cooperation, participation, and engagement
- *Do not pack-up/put away instruments until you are dismissed by the director to do so*

STUDENT BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

Students will be asked to follow all classroom norms/expectations in order to better facilitate an environment that is best for the learning of ALL students. With the very large classes we have it will be all the more important to follow the classroom expectations/norms. While students will be asked to make good personal decisions regarding their in class behavior, the below expectations/norms should be followed at all times:

- **No eating food or drink (other than water) in the band/orchestra classroom.** We are on the ground floor and any food or drink that spills attracts bugs and rodents into the classroom. You will be asked to throw away in the trashcan or dump out in the sink what you are drinking/eating.
- **Practice Personal Responsibility.** Do your Homework (Practice!), Bring all your materials to class, and come prepared to rehearse. Be responsible for yourself and your role.
- **Be Respectful.** Respect the learning of others, respect the classroom space (It's yours, treat it well!), and respect the teacher. When another student or the teacher is talking, you only need to be sure to listen. There will be no talking.
- **Do not play/touch other students' instruments or materials.** If it doesn't belong to you there is no reason to touch it AT ALL. This includes the percussion equipment. Unless you are a percussionist, you may not touch or play the equipment. It is theirs to use, not yours.
- **Personal Electronic Devices.** These will stay in your backpack, on vibrate or silent, *at all times*. They are not to be in your pocket or on your stand. Take them out **ONLY** when directed to do so. School PED infraction policy applies.

What Happens if I don't meet the behavioral expectations?

If you do not meet the behavioral expectations of the classroom or the school, here is the process of contact and consequences that will follow the infractions:

First Offense - Students will be redirected in class and asked what the proper behavior is for rehearsal. *A restorative conversation will also take place.*

Second Offense - Students will be redirected in class, asked what the proper behavior is for rehearsal, and parents will be contacted via email. *A restorative conversation will also take place.*

Third Offense - Students will be redirected in class, asked what the proper behavior is for rehearsal, and parents will be contacted via phone. *A restorative conversation will also take place.*

Fourth Offense - Students will be redirected in class, asked what the proper behavior is for rehearsal, and the behavioral incident will be passed on to administration for further discipline/disciplinary referral.

******PERFORMANCES******

You are expected to be at performances, and timeliness as well as preparedness is essential. In general, there will be no excuse for missing a performance in the Mesa Middle School Instrumental Program. Missing a performance results in a "1" for that performance (each performance is graded). *Any exceptions or extenuating circumstances will be handled on a case by case basis, based on the timeliness of the notice, and/or the severity of the circumstance.* Because performances are considered summative grades, simply not attending may have a significant effect on your grade. When a student misses a performance without prior or post parent notification, a written makeup reflection assignment will be given. This usually consists of a 6-10 paragraph reflection depending on the number of songs we performed.

RESOURCES AND SUPPLIES

Check the [Mesa Instrumental Music Website](#) for anything that you need to know. All documents and information will be posted there for parents and students.

Music and Music Book - Materials used (ie - music, method books, mutes, etc.) are to be cared for by the student or replaced by the student if damaged or destroyed.

- *The standard method book we are using for Beginning Band will be "**Tradition of Excellence Book 1**" and for Beginning String orchestra we will be using "**Sound Innovations for String Orchestra Book 1**". They are available through Amazon, Music and Arts Center, or it can be purchased through the school at the instrument rental night when available.*
- *For Advanced Band, We will use a combination of a method provided by me, as well as continued use of "**Tradition of Excellence**"*
- *For Advanced Orchestra, the standard method book we will be using this year will be a continuation of **Sound innovations for String Orchestra**. More information to come.*
- **ALL STUDENTS will be provided the Rhythm Masters techniques book free of charge.**

Music Binder - *ALL STUDENTS* will have a 3 ring binder with sheet protectors to store their music, music book, practice logs, Pencil, and other IB materials. **THIS WILL BE PROVIDED TO STUDENTS THIS YEAR!**

Instrument Supplies - ALL students are responsible for their personal instrument supplies regardless of whether or not they rent a school instrument or rent/buy their own. This includes reeds, rosin, tuners, shoulder rest, extra sets of strings, as well as drumsticks and mallets for percussionists (*see last page for specifics*).

Tuner (*string students only*) - All string students should have a personal tuner. It is recommended that you buy a Snark Super Tight All Instrument Chromatic Tuner. These can be found at most music stores or on Amazon for a very small nominal cost. There are also a few good tuning Apps for your mobile device.

****HAVE A PENCIL AT ALL TIMES IN YOUR BINDER AT ALL TIMES****

SCHOOL OWNED INSTRUMENTS

If you are free and reduced or have fees waiver, you may not have to pay the below fees

We have the luxury of providing a limited supply of wind/string instruments to students of the band or orchestra program who do not own their own, as well as lots of wonderful percussion equipment to use. If you are able to purchase or rent your own instrument, **you will be highly encouraged to do so!** If for some reason you cannot because the type of instrument is not easy to buy or it is not a typical instrument that is rented from a store, an instrument will be checked out to you while supplies last.

- **The fee for checking out a school owned wind instrument is \$100/year (\$50/semester).** These fees are consistent in our district at all levels, and reflect repair, maintenance, and replacement costs. Students will be responsible for the unit(s) checked out to them.
- **Percussionists will have a \$60/year (\$30/semester) mandated district use fee** for their use of the thousands of dollars worth of school provided equipment. *ALL percussionists will need to pay this district mandated fee.* Students will be responsible for the unit(s) checked out to them.

******PERFORMANCE DRESS CODE******

Strict adherence to the performance dress code is necessary. Students need to be sure to wear the proper concert dress requirements. This is very important. The presentation of the group goes beyond just hearing the music. A unifying visual stage presence is so important.

Boys must wear: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black dress pants or black jeans• Black dress socks• Black button down dress shirt or polo shirt, shirt must have a collar	Girls must wear: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• black dress pants or black jeans (<i>no capris, yoga pants, or leggings</i>)• Black blouse, dress shirt, sweater, polo, or top of any style that is nice• Black dress is also acceptable
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may wear any shoes as long as they are not flip flops, crocs, or slippers. • Shirts must be tucked in, so a belt is encouraged <p>Boys must <u>NOT</u> wear:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colored jeans (white, red, blue etc) or shorts • White socks • T-shirts • No flip flops, Crocs, or slippers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may wear any shoes as long as they are not flip flops, crocs, or slippers. <p>Girls must <u>NOT</u> wear:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capris, leggings, yoga pants, shorts, or skirts that are above the knee (we sit on a raised stage) • White socks • T-shirts • No flip flops, Crocs, or slippers
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GRADING POLICIES

Music grading system regarding band classes.

Grading is very specific and fair in music classes here at Mesa. Below is your grading system:

- **Standups/Tests - 20% of your grade.** Standups are scale tests performed from memory, and tests could be playtests or written tests as they occur on scheduled days. All tests are graded on a the IB 1-8 scale. Standups are *pass/fail*.
- **Practicing - 20% of your grade - This will show up in your test prep and rehearsal**
- **Participation/Rehearsal/Attitude - 30% of your grade.** Obviously, with 50 - 60 people in any given class, attitude and work ethic are *extremely important*. The approach to grading here will be that every student starts with a perfect score, and for anything detrimental to the overall classroom environment, you will lose Work Habits and Content Knowledge points. These might include excessive talking, no pencil, forgotten music, not paying attention, etc.
- **Concerts - 30% of your grade.** These are our concerts that occur throughout the year.

- Always show up, play well, and practice excellent behavior!

HOME PRACTICE - *Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes permanent!*

Individual practice for self-improvement is an integral part of the music program. The standard for home practice will be *90+ minutes per week*, and it is 20% of your grade. Practicing will be a monthly requirement. We will potentially be using a new way to track practicing this year for this task, so your educational/intellectual honesty will be expected. *Stay tuned for more information.* The level of difficulty of the ensemble music, combined with skills tests should reinforce home practice. Students will be responsible for keeping their own practice schedule and Log. *Since home practice is a required part of the grade in band, it is important that you structure your practice time in order to work within your regular weekly homework and activities schedule. Divide up your practice time throughout the week to accommodate your schedule.* The following

is a suggested time-table for daily practice that may make your practice time more structured and enjoyable:

Home Practice Strategy example:

- Warm Up with long tones, lip slurs (brass), snare fundamentals (percussionists), long tones, technique exercises (woodwinds), scales, shifting exercises, technique exercises (strings)- 5 minutes
- Practice ensemble music - only work on stuff that's hard! - 20 minutes
- Play whatever you want for fun! - 5 minutes

Remember, you get credit for all of the practice you do. The above is *just an example* or guideline for structuring your practice time. Even time spent subdividing or working on rhythms in your music counts as practice time!

What counts as practice?

That's a good question! The following will be counted as practice time towards your monthly practice card:

- home individual practice or performing for your parents/family
- subdivision/rhythm counting practice (counting with your instrument in hand to finger through the notes)
- private lesson time
- 2nd instrument practice (ex. - piano lesson or playing etc.)
- District Middle School Honor Ensemble sectionals and rehearsals
- Youth symphony/Band or community symphony/Band sectionals and rehearsals

INSTRUMENT STORAGE

Almost every student will have a locker that will either be used individually or shared for instrument storage. You will be using a school owned lock and you will need to memorize your combination. You will be allowed to choose your own locker that is appropriate for the instrument you play. **Only music materials will be allowed in the lockers.** Lockers are not for storage of personal items like books, jackets, or clothing. Please keep your stuff locked up at all times. Do not touch someone else's lock or the materials they have inside their locker. To ensure we have full use of our music room space, instrument cases must be put back in your locker after you take your instrument out for class. **Backpacks are to be placed on the floor, against the lockers, underneath your locker location.**

PLAYTESTS, SECTIONALS

Starting in September, you will have chair auditions and playing tests during the school day. These appointments are essential to the success of our program and our musicians greatly benefit from them. Sectionals and playtests allow for more individualized instruction, thus better meeting the needs of our students. These are often used for auditions, playtests, and challenges in addition to regular instrument instruction. Students will be sure to get a travel Day Pass from Mr. Van Alphen in advance. When that is, is up to you and your schedule so please

discuss this with Mr. Van Alphen. Playtests - along with standups (on the spot, in class playtest/scale test) - make up 20% of your overall band grade.

CHAIR PLACEMENTS

Audition material for chair placement will be taken from either the provided music and/or from scale/scale exercises. Auditions for ensemble chair placements will begin for advanced band and advanced orchestra after the first 3 weeks of school in August. Audition requirements will be very clear and posted in the room.

Band and orchestra members will be selected and placed based on the overall quality of the audition. Audition requirements will include:

- Scales
- Tone quality
- Rhythm accuracy
- Musicianship
- Potentially a sight reading component

Mr. Van Alphen has the final word on all audition results. Remember, an audition is like a presentation or even a job interview - you only get one shot to do your best, so make sure you are well prepared and relaxed. Your chair placement audition will also be one of your first grades. It will not count for or against your overall grades, but will be used to establish baseline data.

INSTRUMENT/EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

- All students should have the following book for their instrument: **Beg. Band: Tradition of Excellence Book 1, Orchestra: Sound Innovations for String Orchestra Book 1, Adv. Band: Tradition of Excellence, and Adv. Orchestra: Sound Innovations.** Available online, local music stores, or at the rental night
- Make sure your instrument is working properly and clean
- Band students: If you have a smartphone, you can download metronome and tuner apps to use for home practice

BRASS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• slide or valve oil (Blue Juice etc)• tuning slide grease• mouthpiece• all slides must work• no dents in mouthpiece• no dents in valves, casings, or slide• trombones must have a small water bottle to use to spray the slide	FLUTE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• cleaning rod• cleaning rag• tuning cork in proper position• keys and all pads in good condition
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rag to use for spit valve potentially <p><i>**If you are renting from the school, the mouthpiece will be provided</i></p>	
<p>PERCUSSION (required)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one pair Vic Firth 5a or 5b concert snare sticks or like • one pair soft rubber head keyboard mallets • One pair of yarn mallets • one pair Vic Firth M3 mallets or like • one set timpani sticks, medium (not required but encouraged to have) • A stick bag to carry/store personal sticks and mallets is strongly suggested <p><i>**It is important for all percussion students to be responsible for their own supplies, just like all other instrumentalists in the band.</i></p>	<p>OTHER WOODWINDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>four quality reeds (Van Doren or Rico Reserve) 2.5 beginners, 3.0 Adv</i> • cork grease • cloth swab • clean mouthpiece • all keys, pads and corks must be in good condition <p><i>**If you are renting from the school, the mouthpiece will be provided</i></p>
<p>VIOLIN, VIOLA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rosin • Shoulder Rest (no sponges) • Cleaning Rag • Working Bow with full hair • 1 Extra sets of strings • Snark all instrument tuner or Phone App <p><i>*If you are renting from the school, the bow will be provided</i></p>	<p>CELLO, BASS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rosin (Basses make sure it's bass rosin...ask Mr. V about Bass Rosin) • Cleaning Rag • Working Bow with full hair • Snark all instrument tuner or Phone App • 1 extra set of strings for Cellos <p><i>*If you are renting from the school, the bow will be provided</i></p>

It's going to be a great year! Thank you so much for taking the time to read this. I know there's a lot of information in this handbook, but almost all of it is common sense and good judgment. Do the right thing, and most of all, let's make some great music and have a good time! I am really looking forward to working with you all!!

Mr. Van Alphen
Mesa Middle School
Instrumental Music Director

"I feel I can be the most creative when I am given guidelines in which to work"
-Tchaikovsky